



# STEPS FOR SUCCESS

*A research report by:*

*Jamie Burford*

*Kendyll Morton*

*Jenni Hammonds*

*Sarah Clark*

*Co-researched with:*

*Abdifatah Sofe*

*Aisha Bulle*

*Isse Mohamud*

*Umulkheir Amiin*

*Ahmed Sofe*

*Fuad Farah*

*Liban Cade*

**Exploring educational support  
for Somali secondary school  
students in Wellington**

***Wacyi galin cusub oo ka caawindoona  
ardayda dhigata dugsiyada sare ee kunool  
magaalada Wellington***

***“Young people try to adapt in [a new] environment when they are the most vulnerable in the refugee group because they are dealing with a totally new situation ... at a time when they emotionally are not their best, and on top of that they don’t have experience to fall back on.”***

***— Abdi Bihi, Ministry of Education, 2008***

We would like to thank Ron Waddams and Larren Art for permission to use the image ‘Unicef Report’ (1983, 1222 x 122 cm). Clare Rolfe, who inspired the painting, was a Quaker aid worker with refugees from Somalia. Sadly she and her family were killed by a bomb in 1988 in Sudan.  
<http://www.larrenart.org.uk/gallery/>

This report was designed by Jenni Hammonds from Genetic Designed  
[jen\\_vs\\_world@yahoo.com.au](mailto:jen_vs_world@yahoo.com.au)



## PREFACE

We are pleased to present the Wellington Somali Council with our report entitled 'Steps for Success: Exploring educational support for Somali secondary school students in Wellington.' This report is the product of research conducted by ourselves and our research partners, the Somali Youth Group. The research was carried out between April and October 2008. The focus of this research was to examine the existing educational support for Somali young people in the Wellington region and how to strengthen this support. We hope this report offers a clearer picture of the steps to be taken, and provides impetus for action.

This report consists of an overview of the literature surrounding refugee-background youth, the Somali 'community' and both regional and national strategies to support them. This is followed by our methodology, an evaluation of this process, and our findings and discussion. The report concludes with our two key recommendations and ideas for further exploration.

We would like to take this opportunity to thank the Wellington Somali Council for their support throughout the duration of our research. If you have any questions or comments regarding this report please feel free to contact us.

James Burford, Jenni Hammonds, Kendyll Morton and Sarah Clark  
School of Geography, Environment and Earth Sciences  
Victoria University of Wellington  
PO Box 600  
Wellington

Email: burforjame@myvu.ac.nz  
jen\_vs\_world@yahoo.com.au  
klm24@hotmail.com  
sarahclark52@hotmail.com



## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This research project brought together postgraduate students from Victoria University of Wellington (VUW) and co-researchers from the Somali community, to develop a better understanding of the experiences of Somali students in Wellington secondary schools. It is hoped this research will initiate positive action that will support more Somali young people to reach their full academic potential.

The research team consisted of four postgraduate students and seven Somali Youth Group members. The research was conducted between April and October 2008. The project was supported by Sara Kindon, senior lecturer in Geography, as a part of the GEOG404: Geography of Development Studies: 'Young People and Participatory Development' paper. A Participatory Action Research (PAR) approach was adopted by the Research Group, including qualitative methods to generate the findings. Using a PAR approach and participatory tools was a new experience for all involved. Both the postgraduate students and the Somali Youth Group were actively involved in the conception, planning and execution of the research.

### *Findings*

1. There are substantial communication gaps between key groups involved in the lives of Somali youth.
2. While there are many role models in the community, some Somali young people are not receiving the guidance and support they need. Specifically, there are limited connections between young people, and both male and Somali role models.
3. Three key areas within secondary schools were suggested as factors that contributed to Somali youth not reaching their full potential: the cultural and structural differences between education systems in Somalia and New Zealand; school services which could better meet the needs of Somali young people; students' motivation, success and enjoyment of school is compromised by limited English literacy levels. Despite these, both parents and teachers have shown an enthusiasm to be involved.
4. Areas outside of school that contributed to Somali youth not reaching their full potential: the availability of space to study at home; time constraints; varying support from family and friends; and academic support services – prevent Somali youth from achieving their potential at secondary school.
5. Negative perceptions were found to be a barrier to Somali young people fulfilling their potential. The findings suggest the full impacts of this barrier may not be realised by teachers.

After careful analysis the report has generated two key recommendations regarding, firstly, the establishment of a community based liaison person between secondary schools and parents and, secondly, the exploration of a range of mentoring opportunities.

**1** *It is recommended that a community-based Somali liaison person is established to facilitate regular communication between families and secondary schools to bridge the current communication gap that exists.*

**2** *It is recommended that the Wellington Somali Council explores and utilises existing formal mentoring programmes at the present time; The Somali Youth Group expands its base and develops their informal mentoring options.*





## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This research would not have been possible without the assistance of a number of people who offered their time and energy. Firstly, we would like to thank the members of the Somali community in Wellington, teachers, principals and other knowledgeable people - your time and contributions were invaluable. We are also grateful to our Geography 404 class – Monica Evans, Thomas Vink, Caroline Cowie and Ella Smits, thank you for your input and your friendship. We would like to thank Sara Kindon, our lecturer, for her supervision and guidance throughout the year. We also acknowledge Adam, Ben and Dianne from the Wellington Somali Council, thank you for supporting this research. We are grateful to our friends, families and flatmates for your understanding and support.

Finally, thank you to our co-researchers, the Somali Youth Group: Abdifatah, Ahmed, Aisha, Umulkheir, Liban, Fuad and Isse. Thank you for welcoming us so warmly and working with us throughout the process – through you we have learned the value of collaborative research. It has been a pleasure to get to know you and share in your culture.



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## INTRODUCTION

Refugee-background youth are between 12 and 24 years of age. They have come to New Zealand as first generation refugees, or were born in New Zealand to first generation refugee-background parents.<sup>1</sup> The experiences of refugee-background youth are unique. They face three types of pressure; as a young person, a minority and a refugee. In addition to the common problems of adolescence, Somali young people must cope with issues such as integration and discrimination.

Somali young people are supported by a number of broad youth and refugee strategies which are implemented at the national level. At the regional level, an inter-sectoral working group developed the Wellington Regional Action Plan for Refugee Health and Well-being. Agencies such as Refugees as Survivors, Evolve and the Wellington Somali Council offer various forms of assistance for these young people.

This report is the result of Participatory Action Research (PAR) undertaken to explore educational support for Somali secondary school students in the Wellington region. The research was carried out within a Geography of Development Studies paper at Victoria University of Wellington. This provided an opportunity for the postgraduate students to use PAR as a means of interaction with the Somali community. PAR differs from traditional research in that the 'researched' become closely involved in the process. PAR places an emphasis on building relationships and establishing trust. In doing so, the 'researched' are empowered and are actively engaged in the research.<sup>2</sup>

The research was split into two phases. Phase One gathered background information from parents, teachers and key informants. This research utilised qualitative methods such as semi-structured interviews and focus groups. Phase Two used a participatory technique with Somali young people to get a greater insight into their experiences at secondary school in Wellington. The postgraduate students analysed the information and compiled this report with input from the Somali Youth Group and other key parties.

This research is significant because it represents the first study of the experiences of Somali young people in Wellington secondary schools. It is also unique in that the Somali Youth Group were active partners throughout the research process. It is hoped the outcome of this research reflects the sense of optimism felt by the researchers and participants regarding the future of the Somali community.

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1 Department of Labour, 2008

2 Saven-Baden and Wimpenny, 2007

## Researcher profiles

Jamie Burford, Jenni Hammonds, Kendyll Morton and Sarah Clark are postgraduate students brought together through Victoria University's Geography paper, 'GEO404: Geography of Development Studies: Young People and Participatory Development', coordinated by Sara Kindon. The researchers come from a variety of academic backgrounds including: political science, economics, English, philosophy and education, and are studying toward postgraduate qualifications in development studies and education.

The Somali Youth Group was established in 2007 to create a pool of leaders who would engage in community initiatives. Community leaders approached a number of older youth to form a group. Group members were selected because of their time spent volunteering in the community and their experience within the New Zealand education system. The Somali Youth Group is comprised of seven members: Abdifatah Sofe, Ahmed Sofe, Aisha Bulle, Fuad Farah, Isse Mohamud, Liban Cade, and Umlkheir Amiin. They were tasked with creating initiatives within their community, one of which was the idea for a mentoring programme for younger Somalis. The Youth Group underwent a period of training and team building, including a community participation course, which involved a week of intensive seminars.



Jenni Hammonds, Jamie Burford, Sarah Clark and Kendyll Morton



## BACKGROUND

The purpose of this introductory section is to locate Somali young people with a refugee background within global, domestic and local contexts by surveying the literature available on this topic. There is a scarcity of information on the experiences of Somali young people with a refugee background, both in Wellington and internationally. Specifically, there is little information on these young people as they move through the secondary education system. This lack of information has made it difficult for service providers to identify whether there is a need for intervention, and if so, what form it should take. Due to these significant gaps a broader investigation into refugee youth and general refugee literature was undertaken.

This background section will briefly cover the key terms and concepts used in this report. This will be followed by an outline of the refugee context, including an introduction to Somalia and the situations that forced many of these young people to resettle in New Zealand. Finally it will cover the global, national, and local policies.

### Key Terms

#### *Refugee youth:*

Refugee youth, for the purposes of this report, are understood as young people aged 12-24 who have come to New Zealand as first generation refugees or were born to first generation refugee background parents.<sup>1</sup>

*A 'refugee' is a person who "is outside his or her country of nationality or habitual residence; has a well-founded fear of persecution because of his or her race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion; and is unable or unwilling to avail himself or herself of the protection of that country, or to return there, for fear of persecution."<sup>2</sup>*

In our experience the term 'refugee background' is viewed as a negative and unnecessary label.<sup>3</sup> The term obscures the diversity of identities that refugees possess. For some it can have no end date and their refugee 'background' is a permanent label. As Fangen states, "in many respects, refugees start at the bottom rung of the new social hierarchy. They find that their competence is not recognised, and they are instead reduced to being only this, a refugee."<sup>4</sup>

The experiences of refugee background youth, although similar to those of adults, are also unique due to the issues they face and the environments they encounter.<sup>5</sup> Abdifatah Bihi, from the Ministry of Education, has

1 Department of Labour, 2008: 5

2 United Nations High Commission for Refugees, 2007: 6

3 Somali co-researchers have voiced their preference to be referred to as Somali youth as opposed to refugee-background youth within this report.

4 Fangen, 2006: 70

5 UNCHR, 2004

usefully elaborated on the interconnected pressures Somali young people face.<sup>6</sup> Fig. 1.1 shows the three broad challenges.

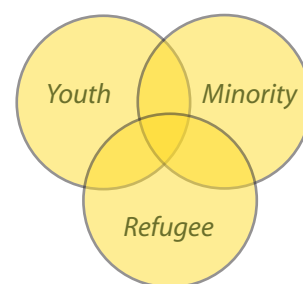
As young people in New Zealand, Somalis experience common age group issues, such as changing relationships with families and peers, physical/sexual development and educational/vocational development; being ethnic minorities in their resettled countries can bring further pressures of racism and discrimination; and being of refugee-background can lead to specific issues relating to health, dislocation, cultural differences and changing gender roles. Dealing with all three simultaneously can be extremely challenging.

### *Somali 'community'*

The Wellington 'Somali community' is united through Islam as well as cultural and linguistic similarities. Despite these similarities it is a collection of individuals and families, many of whom are from different clan, regional and socioeconomic backgrounds. Somalia became embroiled in civil conflict through the 1980s. The internal conflict culminated in full-scale war in 1988 with an estimated 50,000 to 100,000 people killed.<sup>7</sup> Many people fled into exile abroad or became refugees in camps in the neighbouring countries.<sup>8</sup> The escalation of the conflict in 1991 produced further refugee flows of more than one million people out of Africa.<sup>9</sup> Many of the members of the Wellington Somali community did not know each other in their home country, and may have come from clans that have been or still are in conflict in Somalia. Therefore, referring to a Somali 'community' is used in reference to the Wellington Somali population rather than to a collective of people who are unified in their outlook, situation and beliefs.

## **Somali Youth in New Zealand**

During the early nineties 94 Somalis, who had fled civil war, drought and famine, sought refuge in New Zealand. They were the first African people to come to New Zealand in significant numbers. By 2006 there were 1,857 Somalis in New Zealand; some had arrived as refugees, others had emigrated under the family reunification scheme.<sup>10</sup> A high proportion of the Somali community is made up of young people. In New Zealand the issues faced by Somali youth – in terms of their refugee-background and their status as youth – are approached in a number of ways. On a national level there are broad youth and refugee strategies as well as specific policies, in areas such as health. At a regional level the approach is spearheaded by the Wellington Regional Action Plan for Refugee Health and Wellbeing Inter-sectoral Working Group.



Challenges of identity facing  
Somali young people.

6 Abdi Bihi, 1999

7 Gundel 2002 and Suleiman 1997

8 Lindner 2000a

9 Gundel 2002

10 Beaglehole 2007

## *National Strategies*

### Youth

A number of strategies have been created to support youth. The overarching strategy is the 'Youth Development Strategy Aotearoa' (YDSA), created by the Ministry of Youth Development.<sup>11</sup> The strategy recognises that youth are a diverse group of people but sees a few key principles, such as quality relationships and participation, as vitally important. The research approach embodies the four principles of the Youth Development Strategy:

1. Ensuring a consistent strengths-based approach;
2. Developing skilled people to work with young people;
3. Creating opportunities for young people to actively engage and participate; and
4. Building knowledge on youth development through information and research.<sup>12</sup>

### Refugees

New Zealand's central settlement strategy, 'Our Future Together', focuses on both migrants and refugees. It was created with the contribution of a wide number of government agencies and has three broad goals:

1. Economic transformation – accessing appropriate education and employment; using skills, knowledge and qualifications to stimulate innovation in business and strengthen relationships between domestic and international markets;
2. Families – have equitable access to support and choices they need to be secure and to be able to reach their full potential in all aspects of social and economic life; and
3. National identity – having a sense of belonging to New Zealand while maintaining cultural identities that contribute to New Zealand's social and cultural vibrancy.<sup>13</sup>

## *Regional Strategies*

### Refugee/youth

The Wellington Regional Action Plan for Refugee Health and Wellbeing Inter-sectoral Working Group works in conjunction with other local strategies such as the Wellington Regional Settlement Strategy. The group has developed an action plan that focuses on capacity building of refugee background communities, living

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11 Ministry of Youth Development, 2002

12 Ibid, 2002

13 Ministry of Immigration, 2007: 10-11



*In many respects, refugees start at the bottom rung of the new social hierarchy. They find that their competence is not recognised, and they are instead reduced to being only this, a refugee*

— Fangen, 2006: 70



well, economic wellbeing, safety and security, housing, knowledge and skills.<sup>14</sup> It is recognised that youth face specific challenges within these areas and that a large proportion of Wellington's refugee community are young people. There are other agencies that support refugee background young people in the Wellington region:

- 'Refugees as Survivors' - an agency which offers mental health services for refugees. Staff are trained in "cultural differences, trauma and cross-cultural mental health."<sup>15</sup>
- 'Evolve' - a Wellington youth centre for young people of all ethnicities, that offers support and services of a doctor, counsellor and social worker.<sup>16</sup>
- The Wellington Somali Council - assists refugee-background youth by offering a number of programmes such as the Homework Club. It also supports soccer tournaments, leadership camps and holiday programmes to assist Somali and other youth in reaching their full potential.<sup>17</sup>

## Summary

The challenges faced by Somali youth are diverse. They are faced with issues specific to both youth and refugees. Some are complex and challenging, while others are relatively easily fixed, especially when youth are engaged to solve the problems themselves. It is appropriate to celebrate the successes of initiatives that are working with refugee-background young people and are making a difference. However, it is important to acknowledge that Somali youth still face significant challenges, both internationally and regionally. To overcome challenges and build upon strengths, these young people need to be supported and engaged with meaningfully to create solutions.

<sup>14</sup> Human Rights Commission, 2006: 19

<sup>15</sup> Refugees As Survivors, n.d.

<sup>16</sup> Evolve, n.d.

<sup>17</sup> Wellington Regional Action Plan for Refugee Health and Well-being, 2006: 20



## METHODOLOGY

### Participatory Action Research

Participatory Action Research (PAR) was the approach undertaken by Victoria University postgraduate students when collaborating with the Wellington Somali Youth Group during this research process. Together, both parties formed the Research Group that used both participatory and qualitative methods to generate information. Using a PAR approach and participatory tools was a new experience for all those involved. Both the postgraduate students and the Somali Youth Group were actively involved in the conception, planning and execution of the research.

PAR differs markedly from orthodox research approaches which are characterised by their 'top-down', extractive and hierarchical nature. In contrast, PAR involves the 'researched' in the research process and values the inside knowledge they possess. This inclusion enables the research to be relevant to the concerns of the researched community and ensures the meaningful engagement of community members in all stages of the process. PAR values forming relationships and establishing trust and rapport. This can be fostered through relationship-building activities, and also through collaborative research, with insiders as co-researchers. In PAR 'the researched' are empowered through the process of participation<sup>1</sup> and the skills acquired by participants and collaborators are as important as the information that is gathered.<sup>2</sup> Therefore, a true PAR process is one that has an emphasis on the quality of the process, as well as the results of the research.

### Establishing and Maintaining Relationships

Collaboration between postgraduate students and the Somali Youth Group began in April 2008. After initial introductions at Victoria University and at the Wellington Regional Refugee Resettlement Forum, the two groups met together at the Somali Council and formed the Research Group. Initial group meetings provided space to share and discuss academic and personal backgrounds, graduate students' emerging knowledge of PAR and the Somali Youth Group's knowledge of their culture. Emphasis was placed on shared facilitation and democratic decision making in an attempt to ensure that all voices within the group were heard. Techniques used included separating into sub-groups then reporting back to the bigger group, alternating partnerships, designating a meeting facilitator each week and being flexible in our working approach.

Group meetings were a vital part of the research process. They enabled the Research Group to establish and maintain strong working relationships throughout the year. While meetings were orientated toward research, food always played a role and informal 'catch-ups' became lengthier as friendships evolved. Meetings allowed postgraduate students to experience Somali culture first hand. 'Somali time' was initially a new concept for

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1 Saven-Baden and Wimpenny, 2007

2 Kindon et al., 2007



“You cannot just impose ... it has to come from them, they have to own it— Koos Ali, Co-founder of Changemakers Refugee Forum”

the postgraduate students and the importance the Somali Youth Group placed on discussion and relationships became an important research factor.

Relationships were further strengthened through a myriad of social occasions including the celebration of Ahmed Sofe's graduation where postgraduate students were privileged to partake in a Somali feast and dancing. The experience of fasting for the first day of Ramadan and attending Iftar at the Wellington Mosque all contributed toward the postgraduate students' cultural understanding of their co-researchers outside of the research environment.

## Planning the Research Process

In June<sup>3</sup> the research team decided on two phases in which the research would be carried out. Participants were selected based on their understandings of the experiences of Somali young people at secondary school. The first research phase consisted of key informants, parents and teachers and the second phase worked with youth from three different secondary schools.<sup>4</sup> Phase One allowed information to be gathered surrounding Somali students to prepare for Phase Two.

## Conducting the Research

### *Phase One: Peripheral stakeholders/target groups*

The three sub-groups researching key informants, parents and teachers were comprised of at least one Somali Youth Group member and one postgraduate student in order to ensure a diversity of skills and cultural knowledge.

### Key Informants

- Abdifatah Bihi (Somali), Refugee Education Co-ordinator at the Ministry of Education,
- Adam Awad (Somali), Executive Chair of Changemakers Refugee Forum
- Koos Ali (Somali), Co-founder of Changemakers Refugee Forum and Refugee Health Promoter of Hutt Valley District Health Board
- Simone Piatti, General Manager of Evolve
- Zeenah Adam, tutor at the Homework Club

<sup>3</sup> See research time line in Appendix A.

<sup>4</sup> Interview times and locations were at the convenience of the participants.

- Judi McCallum, ESOL Specialist at the Assessment and Access Specialist Services
- Four male Somali university students
- Sandy McCallum, Principal, Mt Cook School (primary)

The above individuals are considered key informants because of their familiarity with the experiences of Somali young people. Semi-structured interviews were the qualitative technique used with all key informants. Interviews provided a means of drawing out the depth of knowledge possessed by key informants.<sup>5</sup>

## Teachers

- Four ESOL teachers from three Wellington secondary schools
- Year Nine Dean/Teacher
- Career Advisor

Involving secondary school ESOL teachers and school staff was important due to their vital role in the education of Somali youth. Teachers<sup>6</sup> were interviewed from three secondary schools in the Wellington area, including co-educational and single sex schools. An interview with a primary school principal gave insights into the differences between primary and secondary schools and the transition process between them. Focus groups and interviews were used as qualitative research techniques to generate discussion and uncover attitudes and perceptions held by teachers, as well as to document their suggestions and recommendations.<sup>7</sup>

## Parents/Caregivers

Involving the parents/caregivers of Somali youth was vitally important to this research. Parents/caregivers determined the participation of youth in the research project and they also possess cultural knowledge important in formulating recommendations. Due to cultural differences making contact with the parents was a difficult process. Western forms communication, such as letters home with children were ineffective. Somali people have a strong preference for communicating orally, and many are not literate in either English or Somali. Word of mouth and announcements within the community were the most useful means of contacting parents/caregivers and several attempts were needed before word spread and focus groups were able to be conducted. This process highlighted the barriers that can be encountered when researching across cultures and demonstrates the benefits of working collaboratively with those from the community.

5 Hoggart et al., 2002

6 The focus group included two ESOL teachers, the careers advisor and the Year Ten Dean/teacher.

7 Two interviews and one focus group were held at three different secondary schools alongside one interview at a primary school popular with Somali families.



Kendyll Morton conducting 'Stepping Stones'



Fuad Farah with Carol Piper



'Stepping Stones'

Focus groups were chosen with the parents for two reasons. The first is their flexibility in enabling participants to decide the main issues rather than facilitators; and second, for their efficient use of time.<sup>8</sup> The co-researchers facilitated the discussions which were conducted in Somali and were subsequently translated. The focus groups offered a way of gaining insight into the frustrations and recommendations of parents in terms of their children's educations. In addition to the information gathered from the focus groups, informal discussions also occurred while obtaining consent for the Somali youth. This required door-to-door visits to Somali homes and provided the opportunity to speak with parents who did not participate in focus groups.

### *Phase Two : Youth Voices*

Following the completion of Phase One, the research group conducted an activity with the students. Somali youth are in a unique and often under utilised position to understand and analyse their own experiences. The majority of young people participating were under sixteen years of age and therefore required parental consent. As mentioned previously, the oral nature of Somali communication necessitated the research and consent process to be explained face-to-face to parents. This enabled questions from parents to be answered immediately and enabled the postgraduate students to gain a few insights into the homes of Somali families.

While gaining consent, the Research Group also approached secondary schools to ask for permission to conduct focus groups with their Somali students. Holding focus groups at secondary schools was a practical decision in terms of dates, location, timing, and numbers. Activities were held during the school term, mid-week and in the lunch hour. All secondary schools were accommodating in the provision of space and organising attendance on the day of the workshops. The participatory technique 'Stepping Stones' was used with Somali youth. This activity involves the students crossing a metaphorical river (symbolising finishing secondary school) to explore motivations, supports and challenges faced by Somali students at secondary school. The several stages of the activity represented building the riverbanks, creating stepping-stones, pointing out crocodiles, 'spearing' them where possible, and finally the crossing of the river. The following are questions students were asked:

- What are your feelings about school/your education now? (Referring to the nearby riverbank)
- How do you expect to feel and what are your goals for when you have finished school/your education? (Referring to the distant riverbank)
- What factors make learning easier? (Referring to the stepping stones across the river)
- What factors make learning challenging? (Referring to the crocodiles in the river)
- What are the possible solutions to the challenges you face? (Referring to the spears)

Before 'Stepping Stones' was carried out with Somali youth the activity was piloted twice. Roles were allocated to Research Group members: lead facilitator (Somali researcher), co-facilitator, resource person, and note taker. The activity was role played on two separate nights - once at the Somali council with the Research Group and the once at Victoria University with classmates, and former students of this course as participants. Training sessions made it clear where adjustments to the activity were needed before conducting it in schools.

The activity was then undertaken over lunchtimes at the three schools involved. For cultural reasons, female researchers were assigned to female participants. In total, eighteen Somali youth participated in the activity, four females and fifteen males. The research team enjoyed carrying out the activity and a range of information was obtained.

## Analysis, Interpretation and Feedback

At the conclusion of Phase Two the postgraduate students went about organising the generated information. The focus groups with parents and teachers were thematically coded. Semi-structured interviews with key informants were coded in a similar manner. The 'Stepping Stones' activity conducted with the Somali young people was organised into a table to clearly show the differences and similarities of student responses.

The next stage of the analysis involved arranging the information into a 'cause and effect' flow chart. Starting with the central problem of 'Somali young people not achieving their educational potential', the postgraduate students sought to determine the contributing factors and underlying causes. From this detailed analysis, themes emerged and findings were put under the relevant headings and discussed. From the findings, themes and discussions, four key recommendations emerged. A draft report was written by the postgraduate students.

These initial recommendations were generated from the postgraduate students' interpretations during the writing stage. It was important that key informants, and more importantly the Somali Youth Group, had the opportunity to give feedback on the recommendations. To accommodate this a number of opportunities were made available. A presentation of the research and recommendations was given and all key informants were invited to contribute during a question and comment session. Teachers who could not attend the presentation were given the opportunity to comment on the recommendations via email. A meeting was held with the Wellington Somali Council and Somali Youth Group to discuss the report in full. Conferring with key informants and the Somali Youth Group provided valuable opportunities to reinterpret and refine the recommendations. This process led to two key recommendations being proposed as opposed to four. At this point the final report was refined and formatted.



## Evaluation of Methodology and Process

Working in the spirit of PAR has been a challenging but ultimately enriching experience. It has generated information that has captured a level of complexity and richness within Somali young peoples' lives unable to be reached quantitatively or even qualitatively as a result of the teamwork and bonding that has developed between the postgraduate students and the Somali Youth Group. It has enabled the research to make culturally-appropriate and relevant recommendations that are informed by the experiences of the young people themselves.

### *What worked well*

#### Working collaboratively

- The level of trust between the postgraduate students and the youth leaders created an open and constructive working relationship. This was critical in accomplishing the Research Group's ambitious research goals.
- The dedication and flexibility of the postgraduate students and the Somali Youth Group, without which the challenges that arose would not have been overcome.
- The willingness of the Somali Youth Group to conduct research in a manner that was unfamiliar and demanding.
- The readiness of the Somali Youth Group to assist with facilitating focus groups, conducting interviews and participating in the youth workshops. Individuals within the Somali Youth Group took the lead during parts of this research process, notably when resource and time pressures were an issue.

#### Support of research participants

- The openness of the Somali secondary school students who participated in the research and who were prepared to share their experiences. The trust shown by these young people and the experiences they shared contributed significantly to the research.
- The supportive attitudes of parents and secondary schools; willingness to participate despite feeling they have been over-researched. The parents displayed an enthusiasm and willingness to improve their children's educations. Particularly significant was their honesty in discussing the challenges and frustrations they face as Somali parents in New Zealand.



- The expertise of key informants and their continued interest and eagerness to help where needed.
- The consistent support from members of the Wellington Somali Council and the space and resources provided for the group.

### Regarding the workshops

- Introductions and explanations in Somali from Somali Youth Group members.
- Piloting our youth workshops.
- Being flexible, willing to change plans and take opportunities.
- Going into the spaces in which these young people live and learn, we gained a much greater understanding for the context of our research.
- The Research Group's relative proximity in age to the Somali secondary school students.

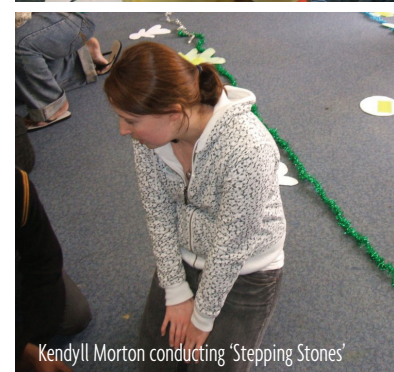
### *Constraints and limitations*

#### Positionality

The postgraduate students recognise their position as outsiders to the Somali community, and the secondary school youth. We attempted to be aware of our positionalities throughout the research process, which influenced and affected our understanding of the issues.<sup>9</sup>

#### Unrepresentative of the Somali youth population in Wellington

- Research was limited to three secondary schools in the Wellington region.
- Within the secondary schools, the workshops were likely to have excluded some individuals. This could be because the workshops were held in the students' free time, which inhibited their willingness to participate. Some parents did not consent to the participation of their children and others may have been unaware of the research.
- The research with Somali youth was unable to include more than four female students. This was because of the lack of parental consent in some cases, and on the day of the workshop, the personal decisions of the female students and a bus strike prevented some students from attending the workshop.



<sup>9</sup> Dowling, 2000

- The participants in Phase Two of the research were currently enrolled and attending secondary school. This is a limitation in that the researchers were unable to talk with Somali young people who were not at secondary school. The possibility exists that those most in need of support have been missed by our decision to research secondary school students.
- There was some resistance from the community in participating in another research project. Parents were disappointed that after previous research projects they had seen little action.
- Areas of information went through several stages of interpretation: the discussions among mothers and fathers in Somali was interpreted and noted by Somali Youth Group members, then interpreted and written into the report by the postgraduate students.

### Time constraints

- The nature of this research meant it was pulled in different directions; it was simultaneously a course requirement, extra-curricular activity and a community service for different members of the Research Group. This meant individuals within the research group had varying levels of motivation and commitment, which at times made planning and research difficult.
- The use of PAR when working within an institution such as Victoria University, which demands deadlines of student assignments, creates a constant tension between process and results. Relationships with participants could have evolved and information would have become richer if the report was not due by the end of the academic year.
- Youth workshops were conducted within school lunchtimes, ranging from thirty-five minutes to one hour. Ideally we would have liked to have had longer or more than one workshop per school. This prevented students from responding to findings from the previous session, and did not enable the depth we were hoping for with some students.
- This lack of time also limited our ability to build relationships with the students, and possibly the amount of information they were willing to share with us.
- The nature of PAR meant the Research Group could not make any guarantees regarding the outcome of the research. This was problematic when participants wanted to know what post-research action would be taken. Furthermore, the postgraduate students are only involved in the research and report writing, not necessarily actioning the recommendations. This will be carried forward by the Somali Youth Group.



## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

### Communication Gap: Findings

#### *Parents and Secondary Schools*

##### Trust

- Teachers recognised that parents lacked trust in their children's schools.
- Teachers wished to strengthen their relationship. Parents also wished to improve their relationship with their children's schools.
- One teacher stated that he/she felt parents did not sufficiently trust the school to uphold their cultural and religious beliefs, or feel their children were safe at school. This was especially true in regard to activities that happened off school grounds.

##### Culture

- Teachers spoke of the difficulties parents have with retaining their culture while also allowing their children to adapt to a new education environment.
- During the focus group a number of Somali fathers mentioned the need for secondary schools to understand their children's culture, values, beliefs and educational background.
- Key Informant A suggested the Somali community is not one where people talk about their difficulties as this can be shameful for the family or community. This led to parents not seeking advice from their children's school and not telling them "that they need extra support for their children."
- It was noted by Key Informant A that a lot of refugee communities come from cultures "where the school does everything for them." This could explain Somali parents' hesitation to become involved in their children's education.
- Fathers noted a lack of understanding on behalf of the parents and one youth leader noted many parents do not understand the mainstream system and are unable to guide their children through it.
- One teacher had observed, like other refugee background parents, Somali parents appeared uneasy about or unsure of how to become involved in their children's education. It was suggested by Key Informant B that it is not that the parents don't want to support their children, they are just not familiar with the education system and subjects.



“ [Somali parents] don’t quite  
know how to become involved  
— ESOL teacher ”

## *Somali Youth and Parents/Caregivers*

- Key Informant A noted that parents did not have a full appreciation of what school-life was like for their children. Somali youth have to “figure out a very strange environment” while facing “a lot of expectations from the family, the community, and host community.”
- One youth leader suggested that some Somali young people do not pass on school reports to their parents, which results in limited information is reaching parents.

### **Logistics**

- One teacher mentioned that finding a time to discuss education issues with Somali parents was difficult because of the parents’ working hours. However, it was noted the meetings that have been held at the school that involve Somali parents have been successful.

## *Secondary Schools and Somali Youth*

- Key Informant A commented that the educational system encountered by Somali young people in New Zealand “is absolutely different” to that of Somalia. Differences in understandings of time keeping leads to inconsistent class attendance by some students.
- It was observed that the career programmes within schools could better meet the needs of Somali students, although as Key Informant C suggested, programmes such as Refugee Career Pathways are new initiatives.
- Key Informant D suggested Somali students often feel undervalued within the school system because they are not equipped to be part of the institution like other students. One school noted that the information for in-school programmes is not clear enough for the Somali students, which reduced their participation.
- Key Informant A noted that more time was needed for Somali students to “educate themselves about how to use the facilities available in school.”

## *Bridging the Communication Gap: Findings*

### **Parents and schools**

- One teacher commented that a teacher aid liaised with parents from another refugee background group and invited them to a general “meet the school evening.” Since then these parents have visited regularly.

- It was noted by the primary school principal interviewed, that their Somali school caretaker had helped maintain the welcoming environment for parents at the school. It was mentioned that his position was one of an informal liaison person.
- Teachers at all secondary schools enthusiastically agreed that a liaison between the schools and parents would assist in minimising the communication gap between teachers and parents. It was suggested that the person who fills this role must have the trust from both the parents and the students in order to be effective.
- Parents suggested employing a Somali specific teacher aide to assist their children in ESOL classes. Parents mentioned this had worked well in one school but the assistance was not regular enough.
- It was observed that one secondary school employed a Somali ESOL teacher and that this role was effective. Her role intermittently expanded to interpreter, pastoral carer, and liaison between parents and the school.

## Students and schools

- It was suggested by Key Informant A that ESOL could act as a transitional tool for students in addition to providing language skills.
- One school has a member of staff from the Somali community who at times acts as an intermediary between parents, schools and students.

## Discussion of Communication Gap

### *Parents and secondary schools*

The findings suggest there is a communication gap between Somali parents and teachers at Wellington secondary schools. They also show that limited communication has impacted on parents' involvement in this setting. A number of parents commented on the limited trust they have in schools, which was a concern mirrored in the literature.<sup>1</sup> Despite limited communication, both parents and teachers wanted to improve and strengthen their relationship. Parents were particularly eager to be more involved in their children's schools and education more broadly.

These findings are supported by international studies, which have also found that communication gaps exist between refugee background parents and their children's schools, they found that "many Muslim parents wanted to be involved with their children's education but were often afraid of being misunderstood as a result

1

Collie, 2007

“It’s an ongoing conversation that needs to be had, and it’s going to take quite a long time — Sandy McCallum, Principal of Mt Cook School”

of their culture and their language barriers”<sup>2</sup> International research also suggests the communication gap is caused by refugee background parents fearing they will ‘lose face’ when discussing challenges. This often deters them from communicating with and asking for assistance from their children’s schools.<sup>3</sup>

Despite limited communication, it was found that both parents and teachers were enthusiastic about improving the situation. The importance of schools communicating with and welcoming parents has been stressed in the international literature because “refugee adults can be important links between schools and ethnic communities”<sup>4</sup> Creating links between schools and their ethnic communities is a means of negotiating cultural differences and increasing the trust parents have for their children’s schools.

### *The communication gap between schools and students*

The findings suggest that a communication gap exists between Somali students and their schools. Somali students have to negotiate an unfamiliar school system and understand information generally aimed at a western, English speaking majority. These findings are supported by the international literature which has suggested many Somali students “...report experiences of humiliation and the need for a broker because of their lack of knowledge about the new context”<sup>5</sup> The literature affirms, “it is important efforts are made to understand the traditions, family structures and values of refugee youth, so that programs can be developed to meet their educational needs.”<sup>6</sup>

## **Role Model: Findings**

### *Family role models*

- One teacher noted, “They need someone who makes sure they come home, do their homework.”
- Teachers commented that some Somali students have lost parents. As one teacher said, some “boys don’t have effective fathers in their lives...”
- One teacher saw the need for positive role models to assist students who were having “difficulties within their families.” Parents also commented that it was difficult for them to be role models for their children in New Zealand.

2 Fernández-Kelly and Curran in McBrien, 2005: 352

3 Fernández-Kelly and Curran in McBrien, 2005: 340

4 McBrien, 2005: 355

5 Fangen, 2006: 419

6 Lam in Kilbride and Anisef, 2001: 24

- Parents commented that their knowledge of the New Zealand education system is limited.
- It was observed that many parents have expectations for their children's future that differ from the children themselves.
- Teachers mentioned that children and parents integrate and acculturate at different speeds.

### *Role models in school/peers*

- Many students saw teachers as positive role models, identifying which teachers were the most attentive and the attributes that they possess.
- One teacher noted that some current Somali students at his/her school were not proving to be positive role models for their younger students, which has been the case in previous years.
- Teachers showed a desire to foster a stronger relationship between students and their Somali culture.
- Some students identified peers as strong role models. A male student stated a good friend is someone "who wants you to succeed in life". Another male student said "You can do it. If someone tells you, you will."

### *Mentoring*

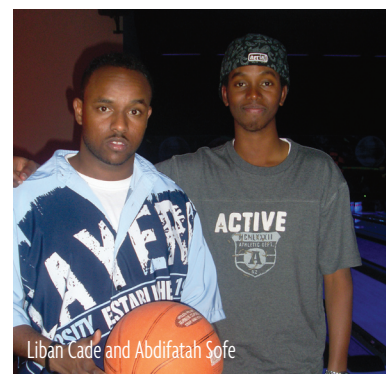
- Many teachers spoke about mentoring. They noted that students who previously had mentors experienced positive outcomes. However, they expressed the need for any mentoring program to be well organised, and that mentors would need to be well trained and committed to the mentee. As two teachers said:

T1: "...this kid becomes attached to them, develops some respect for them and then goodbye, its started all over again, its defeated the purpose..."

T2 "yes, it's defeated because what has probably happened throughout that kids life is that the men in their life have gone..."

### *International role models*

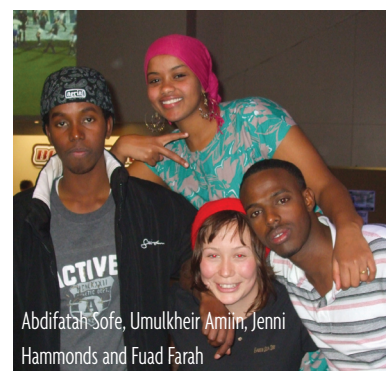
- Some research participants attributed the limited number of Somali role models in Wellington to the rise in African American substitutes as role models. Both negative and positive effects of this were raised.<sup>7</sup>
- One student had very strong role models outside of New Zealand. His role models were the international



Liban Cade and Abdifatah Sofe



Fuad Farah and Umulkheir Amiin



Abdifatah Sofe, Umulkheir Amiin, Jenni Hammonds and Fuad Farah

<sup>7</sup> These were not specified.

“ Q: What helps you?  
 A: The teacher - when I'm angry, she  
 tells me to calm down and tries to  
 help me sort out the problem  
 — Somali secondary school  
 student ”

chefs Gordon Ramsay and Jamie Oliver, “because they worked their way up.” He wants to be an international chef and has 650 cook books at home already!

### *Somali role models*

- The fathers saw the need for role models for their children, to assist them through the education system, but emphasised that these role models should be from a Somali background.
- Three Somali university students commented that role models from within the Somali community would be the most appropriate people to provide support for Somali youth.
- Teachers mentioned that they would like more Somali youth to be role models for the younger students.
- A number of key informants gave examples of successful mentoring programmes that Somali youth have benefited from that did not involve Somali role models.

## **Discussion of Role Models**

Our findings reveal that many Somali young people were able to identify positive role models in their lives. Teachers, however, commented that there was an absence of role models for Somali young people to aspire to in New Zealand. Wider literature on refugee young people connects a lack of role models to the challenges encountered by refugee background families during the process of acculturation. The literature discussed how refugee background young people are not always able to rely on adult support because their parents may be anxious about finding jobs, housing, cultural adjustment or managing their own grief.<sup>8</sup> There were comments about the difficulties Somali families can face with housing in Wellington. In regards to the problems parents may have, a participant suggested how parents communicated their situation to their children was important, saying it was the message rather than situation that were important.

There were multiple comments, from parents and other participants about the difficulty Somali parents have in guiding their children due to their limited knowledge of how to navigate the system. In the literature the issue of navigation and being personally connected is stressed and those who do not have family members knowledgeable about how to access resources, are at risk of being lost in the system.<sup>9</sup> A similar statement was made by a school official in regards to having a personal connection in the secondary school system to prevent students ‘getting lost’. All schools have a type of ‘buddy system’ which the literature also put forward as an answer to individualised attention alongside a teacher who speaks their first language.<sup>10</sup>

8 McBrien, 2005: 346

9 Kilbride and Anisef, 2001: 282

10 Kilbride and Anisef, 2001: 49

Our findings came across a cross-section of opinions regarding who would be the best mentors/role models for Somali youth. Importance was placed on having Somali mentors, but other participants commented that ethnicity did not matter. There was a strong push for youth mentors, yet there were some suggestions for older mentors.

Possessing positive role models was identified by a large number of participants in the research as an important factor in improving Somali young people's educational development. Somali youth identified positive role models such as family members, teachers and friends as "stepping stones" in helping them succeed at school. Male students identified "talking to someone who knows better than me" and talking to a person, "telling me what to do" as a helpful factor in finishing their education.

## **Issues within Secondary School: Findings**

### *School structure/culture*

#### *Age/Year Levels*

- Key Informant C observed that because of their educational backgrounds, the age of Somali students does not necessarily correspond with the appropriate year/educational level in New Zealand secondary schools.
- Older students tend to have more severe disruption to their education and find it more difficult to adapt than younger Somali students.
- Fathers and mothers saw the need for schools to better understand their children's educational backgrounds.

#### *Structure of learning/pedagogy*

- Key Informant E and Key Informant B mentioned that questioning elders or teachers is disrespectful in Somalia.
- Somali mothers have recognised the need for teaching for fuller understanding rather than students being told the answer.

#### *Practicalities*

- It was suggested by Key Informant C that Somali students, if schooled in Somalia, have to adapt to how the New Zealand system operates: class attendance, teaching styles and teachers' expectations.

“ We wanted to call [ESOL] something like ‘multilingual’ for [Somali students] to know they do not have a deficit, but actually more than the other boys, that they can speak more than one language — ESOL teacher ”

- Mothers commented that Somali schools have a higher level of discipline compared to New Zealand.
- Parents saw the need for greater transitional support to alleviate the ‘culture shock’ experienced by Somali young people, when transitioning into New Zealand secondary schools.

### *School services*

#### ESOL as a transitional tool

- Key Informant A felt that ESOL needed to encompass more than assistance with general language.
- It was also recommended by Key Informant A and the fathers that ESOL could provide transitional tools for dealing with New Zealand secondary school culture.

#### ESOL is under-resourced

- Teachers mentioned that although ESOL classes are smaller than most subjects, a student with English language difficulties requires a lot of attention and resources. ESOL programmes are funded per student, however, it was mentioned that this is insufficient to accommodate the level of need.

#### ESOL teaching English contextually

- Female students said ESOL concentrated on speaking when often reading was needed for other subjects.
- One ESOL teacher mentioned that in subjects outside of ESOL, Somali students with poor English are exposed to English but knowledge of subject content is not always gained.

#### The negative perception of ESOL discourages students

- A Somali university student, who attended one of the secondary schools that participated in the research, commented that ESOL often has negative connotations and can marginalize students from their peers.
- A few students acknowledged this perception, but it was mainly discussed by teachers, who wanted to “raise the profile of ESOL as a subject so that it is seen as being valuable”.
- One school has considered changing the name of ESOL to ‘multilingual,’ to make it clear attending ESOL is not a deficit but a recognition of the student learning a second language - “we want to say, hey you guys are great, you can speak lots of languages and just need a bit of help with your English.”

## Career Services

- Many students are uncertain as to where their education could lead. Of the three students who had a clear idea of their career, one student knew the path to take to achieve it.
- Secondary schools offer work experience and career guidance programmes such as Gateway and Refugee Pathways, however it was not made clear why Somali students did not mention these as strengths.

## General Findings

- School services outside of ESOL were rarely mentioned as helpful factors.
- It was observed that many school services are passive in terms of student participation, rather than actively targeting the students that need assistance.
- Two of the three secondary schools recognised that improvements could be made in school services and were considering new initiatives.

## *Motivation, success and enjoyment of school*

- Participants mentioned a number of areas that impacted upon whether Somali young people enjoyed school, and were consequently motivated to succeed academically. These included :

## Fostering and demonstrating strengths

- Teachers noted that the strengths possessed depended on the individual nature of the young person.
- Key Informant D noted that Somali students, who were often marginalized in the academic mainstream, needed to be able to demonstrate their strengths and experience success for motivation in other areas.
- ESOL teachers from one secondary school mentioned that some secondary school subjects that traditionally did not require high levels of English now require reading and writing in order to excel. This further limits subjects that Somali students are able to excel at, despite their ability.

## Differing expectations of Somali student success and failure

- One boy stated “School for me right now is pretty hard cos [sic] my teachers just don’t understand. So they treat me as if I’m stupid. So I don’t try.” Another boy expressed that continually failing removes the motivation and enjoyment of learning.



- Somali mothers were concerned about their children's motivation to succeed in New Zealand schools compared to Somalia. In Somalia teachers play an authoritative role and students were expected to succeed and work hard to achieve.
- Fathers commented that Wellington secondary schools demanded a high workload of Somali students and within set short periods of time.
- The high demand of homework was mentioned by the students who felt they needed more time and support to complete tasks outside of class

### Individual attention

- A number of key informants and teachers expressed concern over the effect lack of individual attention was having on Somali young people's educational achievement.
- Key Informant F suggested that the successful integration and language acquisition in primary schools was partly due to the school's ability to foster individual academic, creative, and physical talents because primary schools are often smaller and the structure of the classes is more flexible.
- Key Informant F also commented that the orientation of secondary schools - independent study and compartmentalized subjects - could lead to students getting 'lost in the system'. Support systems such as pastoral care and counselling, which focus on individual needs, may exist but students sometimes lack the ability or confidence to find and utilize them.
- One female student mentioned that the individual attention from a particular teacher in her personal interests was a significant motivating factor.
- Having a teacher or counsellor who fostered individual needs and interests was also a driving factor for some male students.

### *English literacy levels*

#### Where support is needed with English

- Fathers suggested an emphasis on language support should begin in primary education. Primary school teachers were less concerned with the language ability of students relative to secondary school teachers.
- Nearly all participants perceived language as one of the largest barriers to learning in secondary school.

## How difficulty with English affects learning

- Fathers, Somali community members and youth workers expressed the need for Somali teaching staff or aids to help clarify and explain difficult concepts.
- Male and female students who had difficulties with English found comprehension difficult when English was spoken rapidly or when used to explain complicated concepts.
- Both girls and boys mentioned that not understanding in class leads to boredom and loss of motivation.

## Somali specific concerns with learning English

- Key Informant A advised the postgraduate students that Somali is predominantly an oral language and it was observed that written Somali is not a popular medium of communication.
- Key Informant F mentioned that English literacy is more difficult when students are not literate in their mother tongue.
- Teachers noted that there was not a significant difference in English ability between students who were born in Somalia or in New Zealand as Somali is the language spoken in the home in both cases.

## Discussion of Issues in Secondary School

### *Learning structure/culture*

Findings suggested the challenges encountered by Somali young people in the New Zealand education system are also applicable to students with an immigration background. Cultural and linguistic discontinuities were significant issues for all migrant students, not just Somali students of a refugee background. Problems adapting to New Zealand school systems was also mentioned in the findings. Parents said that New Zealand secondary schools, as well as wider institutions such as the justice system, were different from in Somalia.

Students may have seen their former schools as authoritarian, where they would receive harsh punishments if they broke the rules. This can result in behaviour difficulties in some New Zealand schools where similar levels of discipline do not exist.<sup>11</sup> Mothers who participated in the research highlighted this as a concern, saying that students do not 'fear' their teachers in New Zealand, as they did in Somalia. Corporal punishment is practised in school in Somali but is prohibited in all New Zealand schools.

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McBrien, 2005; Collie, 2007

“My attitude toward school has changed very much. I used to try, now I really don’t care. So I would rather stay at home, or nothing really — Somali secondary school student”

There was also concern from parents that New Zealand schools did not respect their religious and cultural values, and this concern of ‘homogenizing tendencies’ was also brought up in the literature.<sup>12</sup> The research found that Somali young people may be accustomed to different learning styles, which can make individualistic styles of learning difficult. As suggested by the literature, this means that Somali students who are new to the country are not only expected to learn a new language and new material, they are also expected to ‘learn how to learn’ in the New Zealand secondary education system.

### English literacy

Students and the literature mentioned learning was also made more difficult by having to understand concepts in English rather than Somali.<sup>13</sup> This was discussed this as being one of the most significant problems Somali young people face at secondary schools. A lack of competency in English can impact on almost every other subject taken at secondary school. Literature expanded on this suggesting that Somali youth face everyday ‘youth related’ issues at secondary school yet they have to process these issues through a foreign language, using a foreign knowledge and value system. It also stated that this process presents a “massive cognitive burden” that constantly tires the mind.<sup>14</sup>

### Support services

Researcher experiences throughout the process have shown that ESOL is of crucial importance to refugee background students at secondary schools. One of the ESOL teachers expressed concern that poor English literacy may mean Somali students do not develop knowledge of subject content, in subjects outside of ESOL.

The students recommended that ESOL classes were made more contextual in terms of language and concepts needed for other subjects. ESOL teachers, however, were aware of this and discussions over the assessment criteria were being conducted on a national level. Authors have also written on the consequences of having separate ESOL classes, as students have little opportunity to learn colloquial language from their peers.<sup>15</sup>

### Individual attention

Students expressed a need for individual attention, which was supported by the literature emphasising the importance of positive and caring teachers who ‘go out of their way’ to help students or explain things to

12 Alitolppa-Niitamo, 2002

13 Kilbride and Anisef, 2001: 45

14 Alitolppa-Niitamo, 2002: 282

15 McBrien, 2005: 343

them.<sup>16</sup> The literature highlights the importance of relationships and oral face-to-face interactions. The research found that verbal communication with Somali students is received well because of the oral nature of the language.

## Out of School Issues: Findings

### *Inadequate space to study for school at home*

- The issue of not having an adequate/separate space to study at home was raised by key informants in earlier interviews, but was not reflected in our discussions with the students themselves. They did not seem to mind the fact that they did not have a separate study space, saying they simply did their homework on their bed or in the lounge, although later issues raised seemed to question the practicalities of doing so.<sup>17</sup>
- Using the library (school and city) was mentioned as an important study space by the students more often than having a separate room/space to study in at home.

### *Academic services*

- While private tutors were mentioned by some parents as being useful, it was generally agreed that the expense made it unaffordable for many families.
- The Homework Club<sup>18</sup> was another academic support service often mentioned. Several reasons were advanced to explain why Somali students did not maximise their benefit from the services it provides:
  - Many research participants felt the Homework Club was not encouraging learning in a culturally appropriate manner. The Homework Club was seen as a place to interact with friends and the opposite sex, rather than a purely academic space.
  - The tutor-student ratio was considered to be high which is an issue for students who need more individual attention. The lack of tutors can partly be explained by the fact that the role is voluntary.
  - There was a concern that the tutors tended to supply answers to students' questions, rather than encouraging them to develop their own thinking. Adult participants expressed concern about Somali young people needing to learn to think critically.

16 Kilbride and Anisef, 2001: 35

17 See time constraints/distractions prevent study from being done.

18 The Homework Club assists refugee secondary school students with their homework. It is supported by the Wellington Somali Council.



*Q: How many hours do you work?*

*A: 30 hours a week*

*— Somali secondary school student*



### *Time constraints*

- Key Informant A informant mentioned the responsibilities students have at the home, especially those who have solo-parents.
- This was reiterated by a female student who participated in the workshop, who mentioned it was difficult to finish her homework when there were many other chores, and other family members to take care of.
- Other key informants mentioned young Somalis have the additional responsibility of acting as a translator for family members because they are often the most fluent English speaker in their family.
- Some male students participating in the workshops mentioned the effect that working part-time has on their studies. During the 'Stepping Stones' activity, two male students mentioned that working affected their study time, with one boy working thirty hours per week while at school.
- The distraction of television, cellphones, Playstation/XBox and other technology was an issue with male students, with five of them saying it was a 'challenge' during the 'Stepping Stones' activity. These distractions seemed to impact on their physical well-being, with two male students saying they often felt tired at school, or had headaches, after playing Playstation/XBox or watching television late at night.

### *Family and friends*

- A number of students mentioned this factor, in some form, during the 'Stepping Stones' activity. While the male students appeared to see this as a barrier/challenge to learning (bad friends were a distraction), more than half of the helpful factors identified by female students related to peers.
- The parents discussed their limited capacity to help with their children's homework. This issue was also mentioned by Key Informant C as being one of the most important factors impacting on education for Somali young people. Two main reasons were identified as contributing to this:
  - Some parents had a limited education which affected their ability to understand and help with homework. A few were pre-literate in either English or Somali.
  - Many parents were not familiar with New Zealand school systems, suggesting parents may not be fully aware of how to help their children.
- It was also suggested by Key Informant A that parents might not see being involved with schools and their children's education as a large part of their role as caregivers.

- Key Informant A said a lot of Somalis see their main parental responsibility as providing food and shelter. As a consequence they may not engage with the schools at the level expected by the institutions.
- Teachers said the possibility of parents being non-literate in English as well as Somali could also contribute to a lack of ability to comprehend information sent by schools.
- Both parents and ESOL teachers expressed concern over the limited time parents had to help their children with their homework, due to the long hours that many of them worked.
- Some teachers and key informants mentioned that sometimes there is no parent present when the students leave for, and arrive home from, school. This may leave students unsupervised to complete their homework and could mean parents are unaware of their children's workloads.

### *Understanding of 'education'*

- The high value the Somali community place on education and university education was observed.
- One teacher commented that it is expected by the Somali community, that following secondary school, Somali youth will enter university rather than trades or polytechnic.

## **Discussion of Out of School Issues**

The research with Somali youth, parents, teachers and external parties considered aspects outside of school that impact on students' educations. Literature around the educational needs of refugee background students, and more specifically Somali students, supports many of these findings, and also offers some additional insights into the underlying causes of these issues.

### *Employment*

This was an issue found in the global literature which suggested that obligations to absent relatives may put pressure on students to work while at school.<sup>19</sup> This can impact on their educational achievement, with a number of male students mentioning they often feel tired at school, due to their commitments outside of school, including work. The low incomes of refugee background families could be seen as a contributing factor to this issue, combined with the fact that New Zealand based families tend to be supporting family members overseas. The literature also indicates that many students may experience pressure to leave school in order to work to support their families.

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Kubacki, Boin and Feit, 2005

“ I don't feel like going to school  
when I'm tied [sic] and didn't  
have enough sleep  
— Somali secondary school  
student ”

In terms of attitudes toward education, students may not regard it very highly, as they have negative feelings about the types of employment they may be able to attain in the future. As an external party said, the attitudes of the students toward education can be 'what's the point ... if I am only ever going to be a cleaner?' Or 'I wear a hijab, so I won't get a good job'.

### *Family and peer support*

A number of external parties mentioned the lack of family support and supervision at home. While this was initially thought to be due to parents working long hours to support their families, and the parents' lack of capacity to help their children (many being pre-literate themselves), the literature suggests there may also be other reasons. One such reason was misunderstandings due to cultural and language barriers, which lead to Muslim parents being afraid to involve themselves in their children's educations.<sup>20</sup> Parents may be unfamiliar with parent-teacher interviews, reports and supervising homework.<sup>21</sup>

It is not customary for Somali parents to visit schools in Somalia. It has negative connotations around the behaviour of a child, rather than being seen as proactive parenting. For these students, for whom family support is not readily available, the literature suggests that friends and some social service agencies can be important sources of support.<sup>22</sup>

### *Different understandings of learning*

Interviews with several external parties highlighted different understandings of learning as a significant issue. Literature has been produced on the different ways that students from a Somali background learn in comparison to non-refugee background students. Somali culture has a rich oral tradition, and students are familiar with memorizing material. However in New Zealand, independent and critical learning is more valued.

Related to this is the tendency of students to attempt to cope with their learning deficit by going into 'survival mode'. 'Survival mode' was described by external parties as an efficient short-term strategy to learning. It is a phenomenon where students place more emphasis on achieving immediate objectives quickly, but less thought is given to the long term. The external parties considered this detrimental over long periods of time. The Homework Club appears to be used by some students as part of their short-term strategies; a place where they can get answers, and pass their assessments. Without an emphasis on critical thinking and development of thought, this strategy may only serve as an interim measure.

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20      McBrien, 2005

21      Reitsma, 2001

22      Kilbride and Anisef, 2001: 35

## *Integrated approach to service provision*

A number of key informants, parents and teachers interviewed called for more holistic approaches to service provision, with an increased emphasis on the collective or community. This is also noted in the literature, stating that religious organizations and institutions that target the family appear to be more successful in helping newcomers, than other approaches.<sup>23</sup> The same authors also discuss the benefits of an integrated approach to service provision.

## *Academic Support Services*

The Homework Club provides after school academic assistance targeted at refugee background students. The Homework Club provides an excellent opportunity to strengthen Somali students' academic achievement. It offers a neutral space and regular assistance from tutors for Somali students' to complete their homework. There are, however, aspects of the Homework Club that could be improved to make this service more effective. Areas that have been identified as needing improvement are: increasing the number of tutors; teaching and class management training for tutors; increasing parental involvement; the Homework Club being open to the suggestions of parents; and separating genders. It was noted throughout the research that these changes are needed in order to improve this already established service.

## **Negative Perceptions: Findings**

- It was reported by students from one school that they experience bullying which they believed wasn't taken seriously by their school. One student commented that "teachers don't do anything about it, they tell them off but they keep doing it so you just have to ignore it." Another student commented "you get used to it after a while, [you] don't pay attention to it." These comments were supported by Key Informant A.
- One student had lost interest in school and felt that teachers didn't understand him, "they treat me as if I'm stupid."
- A teacher from one school suggested he/she would like to see people's perceptions change and for Somali students to be viewed as equal to others in "ability, aptitude and motivation."
- One student appeared deeply upset by the perception of underlying racism in New Zealand. In particular, comments made by Winston Peters had caused him to feel upset. The student found New Zealand unwelcoming and called it a 'hell-hole'. He was saving money to leave the country.



“ People just judge your culture, just by one person and then they say all Somalis are like that ... it gets you down, but then you harden up — Somali secondary school student ”

- It was noted by a Somali Victoria University student, that an ongoing challenge for Somali youth is negative stereotyping and racial prejudice. It was suggested this includes stigma from the police because “no one wants to hear Somalis are innocent.”

## Discussion of Negative Perceptions

Discrimination and bullying were not prominent issues in this research but Somali students in secondary schools have felt its effects. Literature suggested that bullying can increase the isolation experienced by refugee background students.<sup>24</sup> Both the findings and the literature noted that despite working hard to succeed at school, students “were often discouraged by negative attitudes”.<sup>25</sup> Some students felt teachers failed to take the bullying they experienced seriously. At the same school teachers had not identified bullying occurring within their schools. This highlights an issue that needs to be resolved.

In terms of negative stereotyping and discrimination, students had felt the effects of the wider media and one teacher in particular had noticed how negative perceptions affect Somali youth. One student mentioned how the attitude of others has impacted on his motivation at secondary school. Teachers highlighted the importance of concentrating on what Somali students were achieving despite their situation. One teacher’s example was that ESOL is where students are learning their second language, not just learning English. Literature emphasised, rather than concentrating on the challenges refugee background students face, it is important to focus on the strengths they possess.<sup>26</sup>

24 Kilbride and Anisef, 2001; McBrien, 2005

25 McBrien, 2005: 330

26 Kilbride and Anisef, 2001



## RECOMMENDATIONS

### Community-based liaison between parents and schools

Issues around communication exist between Somali students, their parents and secondary schools in Wellington. The research has identified the need for further research into closing the communication gap between the schools and students, and between parents and their children. Through the research the possibility of creating deanships<sup>1</sup> for immigrant/refugee background students was discussed as a means of closing the student/school gap. It was also observed that communication between parents and children could be improved by engaging parents and young people in dialogue. Suggestions were made that this could take place through forums or seminars. Both suggestions warrant further investigation but are outside the scope of this research and report. The research did, however, provide information with which to make a recommendation on reducing the communication gap between parents and schools. This recommendation is to employ a community-based Somali liaison/intermediary between parents and schools.

Parents have shown an enthusiasm to be involved in their children's education. Teachers share an enthusiasm to involve parents. Existing channels of communication between schools and parents, however, have struggled to actively involve and gain the trust of parents. A lack of communication has resulted in important issues not being addressed:

- Parents may be unaware of what school life entails for their children, and do not fully trust that their cultural and religious values will be respected in New Zealand schools.
- The differing school systems of New Zealand and Somalia may mean that students and parents lack an understanding of the pedagogy within New Zealand classrooms.
- Somali parents are often unfamiliar with the New Zealand school environment and school system which can affect parents' ability and confidence to engage with schools.
- The Somali community is not one where people feel comfortable discussing their difficulties and it can be considered shameful for a family to ask for help.
- Information from schools (reports, newsletters etc) may not reach parents if students do not pass it on.
- Written material is not always comprehended because of parents' limited English literacy levels and the Somali preference for oral communication.
- It is difficult to find a suitable time for teachers and parents to meet.

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<sup>1</sup> A school official responsible for the overall welfare of a group of students.



*The community are not engaged... it's as simple as that ... we need that person to bring people to the school — Adam Awad, Co-founder of Changemakers*



As a result there are differing expectations between schools and parents in terms of what is expected of students both in and outside of school and the role parents are expected to play in their children's education.

Secondary schools do not have the resources to proactively facilitate ongoing communication between the school and Somali parents/caregivers, despite their best efforts. In the past there have been part-time Somali liaisons working within secondary schools, but their role produced limited community engagement. Currently there are cases where Somali school staff members act as informal liaisons between parents and schools, but their capacities are limited as they have other job responsibilities. Communication and relationships have also improved between parents and schools when meetings with a Somali interpreter have been held in the past. The research found that there was strong and consistent support to employ a Somali liaison situated with the community for a number of reasons:

- It would increase the dialogue between families and schools;
- It would provide opportunities for schools to better understand the values and beliefs of their Somali students;
- S/he could communicate with parents in their native tongue; and
- S/he would have a grounding in Somali religious and cultural values.

Teachers have also been enthusiastic and welcomed the idea of a liaison because:

- Teachers do not have time for the additional responsibility of being a liaison;
- Most teachers do not have the cultural knowledge or language required to be an effective liaison; and
- Schools with a smaller Somali student population are not able to justify employing school-based liaisons.

*Recommendation: A community-based Somali liaison is established to liaise regularly with families and secondary schools to bridge the communication gap that exists.*

## Mentoring

The initial focus of this research was to investigate establishing a mentoring programme with Somali mentors. The Somali Youth Group wanted to provide support for Somali students on a range of issues. After discussion it was decided the research would benefit from a wider inquiry into the needs of Somali youth at secondary school. A number of research participants supported the idea of a mentoring programme, however it was found that other avenues could be explored. Although there were suggestions for adult and non-Somali mentors, support for a programme run with older Somali mentors came from community members.

The support for a mentoring programme was based on:

- The general feeling from the Somali community that Somali mentors would be preferable to other mentors, as they would have an understanding of cultural and religious values.
- Youth mentors would be better placed to understand the experiences of Somali young people than adults.
- A Somali youth mentor would be in a unique position to fulfil both of the above roles.
- Somali youth mentors would provide the opportunity for language development, links to the community and possibly work experience.

These findings suggest a mentoring programme could be a valuable means of supporting Somali young people achieve in their education. As Key Informant C states,

*“I believe mentoring is one such area where refugee young people would benefit ... whether they are members of their own community, who can mediate and navigate between the two cultures, which is probably the best option, but if not a caring adult [from outside the community] who can give some guidance”*

The research revealed that establishing a formal mentoring programme would require significant investment, in terms of time and financial and human resources. It would need to be well-set up and have a clear purpose to ensure an appropriate model is adopted.

Mentoring programmes exist<sup>1</sup> in which Somali youth could be involved, both as mentors and mentees. Their involvement would provide the opportunity for Somali mentors to gain experience and mentor training. It would also determine whether mentoring is in fact the best way to support Somali youth. If these existing programmes did not meet the needs of young Somalis then the establishment of a specific Somali mentoring programme would

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<sup>1</sup> Existing mentoring models include “Challenge for Change” and “Ground Zero” and these have been used by, and successful with, Somali youth in the past.



*The youth themselves know  
what they go through,  
and what would be useful*

*— Koos Ali, Co-founder of  
Changemakers Refugee*

*Forum*



benefit from their experience. This would be a sustainable and cost effective way of exploring formal mentoring options.

It has been observed throughout the research that additional avenues exist for the Somali Youth Group to support Somali young people as informal mentors. Opportunities exist within the Mosque, through sporting teams and coaching, and as relatives or friends, for mentors to establish connections with possible mentees. It would be possible for the Somali Youth Group to continue to share their skills at the Homework Club as tutors and through sports such as soccer. Involving younger members of the community in initiatives such as the Somali programme on Access Radio would be another possibility.

*Recommendation: The Wellington Somali Council explores  
and utilises existing formal mentoring programmes at the  
present time; The Somali Youth Group expands its base and  
develops their informal mentoring options.*

***“The important thing is, they all have talents. Every child has a certain talent, we want them to reach their potential. Regardless of how difficult, regardless of what barriers there are. I know that if a child is dedicated, passionate and patient about what they want to be they can be who they want in this world.”***

***— Koos Ali, Co-founder of Changemakers Refugee Forum***

***“[Somali youth] need to see success and feel that they can be successful as well.”***

***— ESOL Teacher, Wellington secondary school***

***“Knowledge is a really awesome thing, knowledge is priceless.”***

***— Somali secondary school student***

***“I came to school end of last year. When I came to school I feel kind of bored because I couldn’t speaked [sic] English. But now I’m a part of school. I think school is the best.”***

***— Somali secondary school student***



## CONCLUSION

This research was a partnership between Victoria University postgraduate students and the Somali Youth Group. It emerged in response to concerns from within the Somali Community that young people were not reaching their potential while at secondary schools in Wellington.

From the outset the postgraduate students understood that refugee background communities “don’t want to be treated as the passive subjects and receivers of policies and services.”<sup>1</sup> Rather, it is important that “people with refugee backgrounds are involved in all stages ... defining the issue, planning, implementation and evaluation”.<sup>2</sup> It was in this spirit that we conducted our research.

Our research revealed that many Somali young people are succeeding in secondary schools in Wellington. However, there were five key areas where improvements could be made. These were: in school support; out of school support; role models; negative perceptions; communication gaps.

These findings led to our two key recommendations: employing a community-based Somali liaison based in the Somali community to facilitate communication between parents and secondary schools; and forming a partnership with existing mentoring programmes as well as extending informal networks where mentoring can take place.

We hope our recommendations go some way to removing the barriers faced by Somali young people. We believe by implementing these steps to success Somali students will be better able to reach their potential.

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1 ChangeMakers Forum, 2008: 2

2 Ibid, 2008: 2



## EPILOGUE

Throughout our involvement in this research we have been impressed by the spirit of the Somali community, they have welcomed us to their parties, into their homes, and into their mosque. Contrary to stereotypes, we have learned that the Somali community, and their young people are strong, open to change and determined to succeed. We have also found that many Somali young people are succeeding, and that this needs to be better recognised and celebrated.

The leadership and guidance delivered by the Wellington Somali Council is impressive and their proactive approach in supporting Somali young people in Wellington deserves special mention. Their innovation in creating a Youth Group made up of successful young leaders is a source of hope and is providing role models for Somali young people to look up to.

Through our research we have also recognised that the Somali community does need extra support to ensure that their young people achieve their potential. What follows are some additional ideas that emerged out of this research. To complement our key recommendations we hope that they show our sense of optimism in the future of these young people, and provide avenues for future action. Some of these ideas require further research, others could be implemented if existing strengths and skills were utilised. Here are some suggestions for future research or action:

- Schools, parents and the wider community should take every opportunity to allow Somali students to demonstrate their unique strengths, and should encourage them to take leadership roles. Schools could consider running a Somali language week, or allow parents to show their strengths and share aspects of their culture, such as Somali food over morning tea.
- The Somali Youth Group should endeavour to make themselves visible role models within their community and expand initiatives in which they are involved.
- The Somali Youth Group could create short term projects to engage with young people and share their skills, such as making a web page on the Wellington Somali Council web site, running soccer skills workshops or encouraging them to participate in the Somali programme on Access Radio.
- Community meetings could be held to discuss youth issues, with young people and their parents. Workshops could also be run focussing on academic skills or career advice to assist students.
- The establishment of a summer school programme to assist Somali students with English difficulties is another possibility. This programme could be coordinated through an existing religious or cultural organisation.
- A gallery space could be utilised by the Somali community to present various aspects of their lives and



“I'd like people's perceptions to change, definitely. I'd like [Somali youth] to be seen as equal in ability, aptitude and motivation as everybody else. And I'd like to see them demonstrate that too, you know, that they are as motivated and feel they can do as well as other[s] — ESOL Teacher”

culture. This could be coupled with art or photography workshops for young people.

- The possibility of convening a media forum was discussed. This would provide an opportunity to challenge stereotypes, to educate the media about the Somali community in Wellington, and also to make links to enable positive messages to be put forward in the future.
- As one school suggested, the language around ESOL could be re-framed to change the negative perception it currently has and to recognise that students are learning to become multilingual.
- Schools could consider how refugee background students could be supported through their transition from primary to secondary school.
- New roles could be created in schools, such as deanships to advocate for refugee and migrant background students.
- A youth newsletter could be established as an outlet for the creativity of Somali youth, it could also increase the awareness of success stories in the community.
- An annual youth conference could be convened for Somali students in the Wellington region, to enable young people to come together to discuss youth issues.
- Inter-cultural connections should be fostered between the Somali community and others, such as Maori/Pacific communities. Some Somali young people were very interested in learning about Maori culture, especially weaving.
- The Homework Club could improve the services it provides to Somali students. The Homework Club should explore increasing the number of tutors, providing further training for tutors, separating genders during the Wellington Homework Club and increasing parental involvement.



Jenni Hammonds, Sarah Clark, Jamie Burford, Umulkheir Amiin, Fuad Farah, Abdifatah Sofe, Nisse Mohamud and Liban Cade at the Wellington Somali Council.



## APPENDICES

### APPENDIX A

#### *Research Activity Time line for Phase One*

28<sup>th</sup> March – 30<sup>th</sup> May

Postgraduate students

Learning about PAR

28<sup>th</sup> March - April 28<sup>th</sup>

Postgraduate students

Literature reviews (PAR, refugee  
background youth)

31<sup>st</sup> March

Postgraduate students, Abdifatah and

Aisha

Refugee Resettlement Forum - Hutt

Valley District Health Board

12<sup>th</sup> April

Research Group

First Research Group meeting - Somali

Council

16<sup>th</sup> April – 25<sup>th</sup> May

Research Group

Sharing PAR concepts and participatory  
activities at meetings - Somali Council  
and Victoria University

16<sup>th</sup> April – 25<sup>th</sup> May

Research Group

Research planning meetings - Somali  
Council

11<sup>th</sup> May

Postgraduate students

High ropes course

25<sup>th</sup> May

Research Group

Separate into subgroups - Key informants,  
teachers and parents

25<sup>th</sup> May – 8<sup>th</sup> June

Research Group

Organise Phase One of the research

- Develop: consent forms; interview  
and focus group guides. Make contact  
with, and arrange to meet the selected  
participants

8<sup>th</sup> June – 10<sup>th</sup> August

Research Group in sub-groups

Conduct Phase One of research

- Interviews and focus groups with key  
informants, teachers and parents

12<sup>th</sup> July

Research Group

Bowling

19<sup>th</sup> July

Research Group

Ahmed's graduation

## *Research Activity Time line for Phase Two*

17<sup>th</sup> August – 5<sup>th</sup> September

Research Group

Obtain consent for Somali youth participants - visiting Somali family homes to speak with parents

7<sup>th</sup> September and 11<sup>th</sup> September

Research Group

Training for “Stepping Stones” - Somali Council and Victoria University

8<sup>th</sup> September – 13<sup>th</sup> September

Post graduate students

Organise holding activity at secondary schools - speak with teachers to arrange times and rooms

23<sup>rd</sup> September – 25<sup>th</sup> September

Research Group (separated into three groups)

Conduct “Stepping Stones” activities  
- Held at three secondary schools in Wellington. Facilitated by Somali youth leaders

29<sup>th</sup> September – 8<sup>th</sup> October

Postgraduate students

Coding of data gathered from Phase one and two - key informants, teachers, parents and Somali youth findings

11<sup>th</sup> October – 17<sup>th</sup> October

Postgraduate students

Analysis of data and development of recommendations

17<sup>th</sup> October

Postgraduate students

Report draft due

20<sup>th</sup> October

Postgraduate students

Practice presentation

23<sup>rd</sup> September

Postgraduate students

Final presentation - opportunity for comments from key informants

28<sup>th</sup> October

Research Group

Consultation with Somali youth leaders

27<sup>th</sup> October - 29<sup>th</sup> October

Postgraduate students

Secondary schools contacted for final consultation

31<sup>st</sup> October

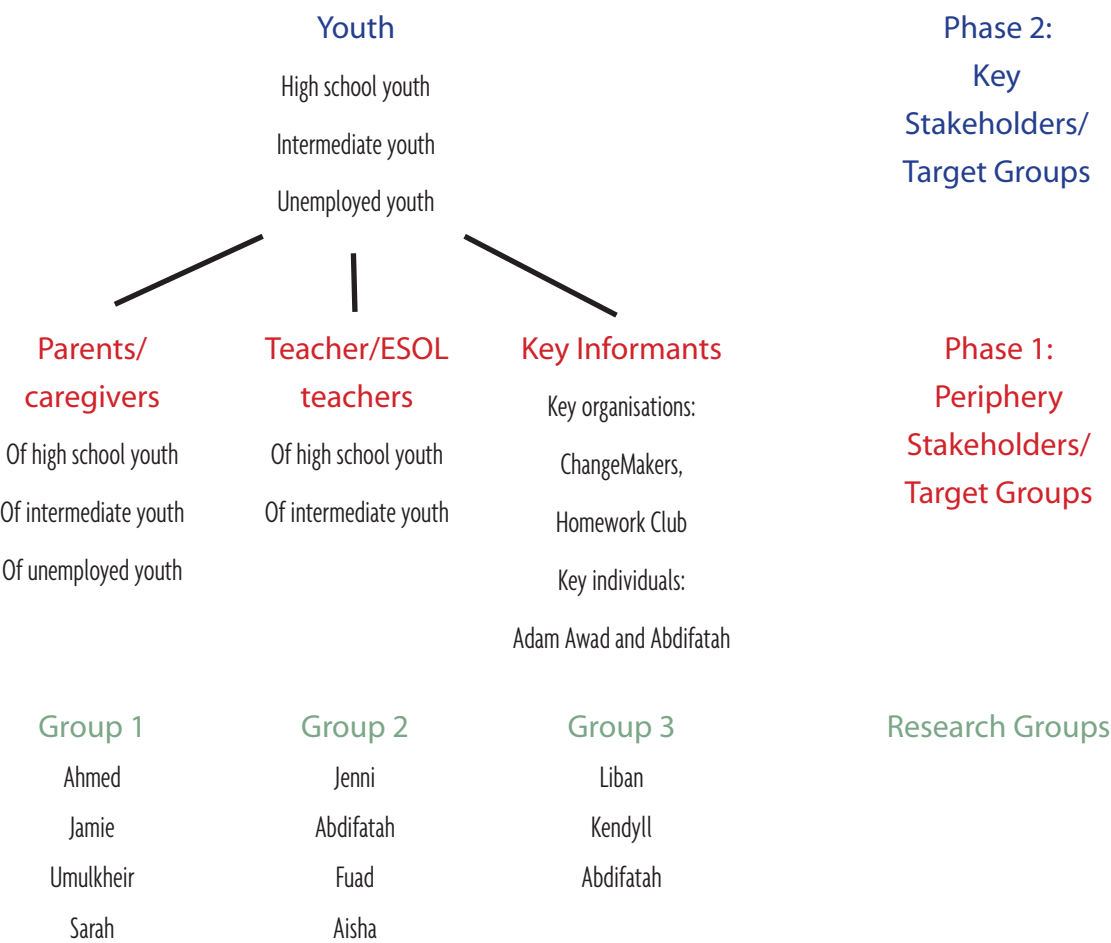
Postgraduate students

Report final due

APPENDIX B

Research phases and subgroups

This diagram represents the initial plan for the research. As the research evolved changes were made due to the constraints the Research Group was under. Time constraints and the difficulty involved with contacting students not enrolled in secondary school meant they and their parents were not able to be included in the research. As the research progressed the scope narrowed to focus on the experiences of Somali secondary school students. Therefore, intermediate students, their parents and teachers were not included in the research.



## APPENDIX C

### *Consent Forms*

The text below is an extract from a typical consent form used for the key informants, teachers, youth and parents. It was modified slightly to be applicable to each group of participants. The form was translated into Somali for the parents' own participation and when obtaining consent for the involvement their children.

**Research Project:** Researching Options for a Somali Youth Mentoring Program.

**Researchers:** Ahmed Sofe, Aisha Bulle, Fuad Farah, Umulkheir Amiin, Abdifatah Sofe, Liban Cade, Jenni Hammonds, Kendyll Morton, Jamie Burford, Sarah Clark.

**Academic Supervisor:** Sara Kindon, Senior Lecturer, Geography, VUW.

I have received an explanation of this research project and had an opportunity to have any questions answered to my satisfaction.

I understand that the purpose of the focus groups are to explore and collect personal views, feelings, ideas, and recommendations which can be used to enhance the provision and delivery of a mentoring program for Somali youth in Wellington through the Somali Council.

I understand that in participating:

- My information will be used to inform a report for the Somali Council and Victoria University, and the report findings may also be presented to interested government and NGO groups, and used in academic articles/reports and presentations.
- I understand that the discussions will be tape recorded.
- I consent to my name and position, as well as any other information provided in the information sheet, to be used in the report or presentations.
- I may have the opportunity to be photographed participating (Choose one option): I am happy to be photographed / I do not wish to be photographed / I am happy to be photographed on the understanding that I will not be easily identifiable.
- I have the opportunity to record any additional comments after the interview on audio-tape and am happy for these to be used within presentations and as quotes in reports.
- I can choose to have a person present for support if I want.
- My information will be stored securely and only accessed by the Graduate Researchers in this VUW course, the Somali Council, and Academic Supervisor named above for a period of ten years to enable its use for further qualitative research, academic publications, and presentations.
- I can withdrawal any information I provide prior to September 1st 2008 by contacting
- Abdifatah Sofe (Somali Youth Leader): Tel: 380 2451 or 0210581091, Email: sofe707@yahoo.com or
- Kendyll Morton (Victoria University Researcher): Tel: 4632306 or 0273390190, Email: klm24@hotmail.com.

## Consent Forms

### Somali Youth Consent Form for Parents

Waxaan helnay warbixin ku saabsan cilmi baaris waxaana fursad ii noqotay in aad iiga jawaabteen su'aalaha aan qabay. Waxaan fahmay fikrada ay ku saleesneed cilmi baaristan si loo soo u aruurino aragtidiina, rayigiina iyo wixii kale oo aad ku darikartaan, sidii wax looga badali lahaa qaabka waxbarashada ardayda soomaaliyeed ee ku nool magaalada Wellington taasoo noo suurto galisay in aan u soo marno Somali Council.

Marka hore waxaan fahansanahay ka qeyb qaadasha cunugeeyga

Hadalka ama aragtida cunugeeyga waxaa loo isticmaalayaa sidii loogu sheegi lahaa ama loogu soo qori lahaa warbixin ku saabsan wixii laga soo aruuriyey aragtida dadka si loo wargaliyo ama loo wacyi galiyo dowlada iyo hayadaha kale, iyo sidii ay u isticmaali lahaayeen ardayda kale ee jaamacadaha dhigta.

Hadalka waxaan rabnaa in aan duubno marka kala dooro labaadan qeyb

Waa la iga duubi karaa hadalkeyga inta ay su'aalaha socdaan si hadhow loo turjumo.

Ma rabo in la iga duubo hadalkeyga inta ay su'aalaha socdaan laakiin waad qoran kartiin.

Magaca cunugeeyga ma rabo in lagu daro warbixin tan ama loo isticmaalo ama lasoo bandhigo. Waxaa rabaa in neynaas teyda la isticmaalo.

Neynaasteeyda waa: \_\_\_\_\_

Cunugeeyga waxaa fursad ah in la i sawiro ama aan sawir ka qeyb qaato (dooro mid ka mid ah)

Waa waxaan diyaar u ahay in la i sawiro ama sawir la iga qaato.

Ma rabo in sawir la iga qaato.

Sawir waa la iga qaatid karaa haddii aan si fudud lagu garneyn sawirkeyda.

Cunugeeyga waxaa fursad ii ah in la duubo wixii hadal keyga ah marka uu dhamaado kulanka ama wixii kulanka dambeeyo sidii loogu isticmaali lahaa warbixin

Cunugeeyga waxaan ogolahay ama aan ku raac sanahay in aan la bixin qofna aan la siin magacyada dadka kale ee ka qeyb qaatay.

Cunugeeyga waan dooran karaa haddii aan u baahdo qof kale wax iga caawiyo.

Aragtideyda ama hadalkeyga cunugeeyga waxaa lagu xafidi doona ama la dhigi doona meel gaar ah, waxaana loo ogolaan doonaa ardeyga waxbarashada ka dhameysay Jaamacada Viktooriya ee maadadan dhigata, Somali Council iyo Dadka Macadka dhiga oo aan kor kusoo sheegnay.

Waan kala bixi karaa wixii aragtideyda ah ama hadal ladii aan sheegay ilaa September 1 2008 Waxaana kala xariiri kartaa

Isse Mohamed (Gudoomiyaha Dhalinyarada) Tel: 380 2451 or 0211504076, Email:mr.isse@hotmail.com or

Jenni Hammonds (Victoria University Researcher): Tel: 3800487 or 0211251727, Email: jen\_vs\_world@yahoo.com.au

## APPENDIX D

### *Interview/Focus Group Guides*

#### Semi-structured Interview Questions for Key Informants

##### **Introduction:**

Introductions of facilitators and the Somali Council involvement

Introduction of the project

Consent form and recorder explained and signed (can name/position be used?)

Outline of how the interview will proceed

Begin recording

Interviewee - state name and position

##### **Questions:**

Problems that refugee youth face in education, and more generally

- What do you believe to be the biggest problems Somali and other refugee background youth face when they first come to New Zealand?
- What do you believe to be the ongoing challenges facing Somali and other refugee background youth, after their initial arrival?
- What do you believe to be the causes of these problems?
- What do you believe to be most important issues regarding education and Somali refugee background youth?
- Services and resources that are already available to assist their development and learning
- Are you aware of any services/resources that are currently available to assist refugee youth learning and development? If so, can you please explain them?
- In your opinion, where do these services succeed and where do they fail to meet the needs of Somali refugee youth?
- Possible ideas for services or resources that aren't currently available, but may be helpful.
- Do you have any ideas about possible services/resources that should be in place in the future to support refugee youth learning and development?

Thank you for your time!

## *Interview/Focus Group Guides*

### Focus Group Guide for Parents

#### **Introduction:**

Introduction of facilitators and Somali Council involvement

Introduction of the project

Consent form and recorder explained and signed

Outline of how the focus group will proceed

#### **Questions:**

1) What are the major problems confronting Somali young people in Wellington, both inside and outside of school?

2) What do you think are the causes of these problems?

3) Can you think of some solutions to the problems that you spoke about?

4) Would a mentoring program help to confront the problems that have been identified?

5) What programs and agencies are already working to support your children?

6) What do you think is important for us to consider when we are designing a mentoring program?

Prompt – What would you include if you were designing a mentoring program?

7) What would encourage you to allow your children to take part in a mentoring program?

8) What would discourage you from allowing your children to take part in a mentoring program?

Thank you for your time!



## *Interview/Focus Group Guides*

### **Semi-structured Interview Guide with Primary School Principal**

#### **Introduction:**

Introductions of facilitators and the Somali Council involvement  
Introduction of the project  
Consent form and recorder explained and signed (can name/position be used?)  
Outline of how the interview will proceed  
Begin recording  
Interviewee - state name and position

#### **Questions:**

What ages does your school cater for?  
What is the procedure when a Somali student comes to school?  
What sort of language support do you have at your school?  
Do you think Somali students adjust quickly into New Zealand primary schools?  
Have most students been living in New Zealand before coming to school?  
Are there certain areas of learning that are more enjoyed by Somali students?  
What challenges, other than language, do Somali students face at primary school?  
Are there other issues you think they face outside of school?  
Are the difficulties faced by Somali students different from other international students?  
Do parents play a large role in supporting their children at the primary school level?  
Do they come into school often and do you have regular contact with parents?  
Do you think a high level of support is needed for Somali students for them to succeed at the primary school level?  
Do you think children at primary school are prepared for the transition into intermediate/secondary schools?  
What is in place at this school to prepare students for the shift?  
If support was to be provided outside of school and the home, what form or type of support do you think would be most effective?  
Do you have any comments or suggestions concerning Somali mentoring/support groups for students at secondary or primary school?  
Do you know of any other support groups or agencies that have useful services for Somali students e.g. career services, youth groups etc?  
Thank you for your time!

## APPENDIX E

### *Interview/Focus Group Guides*

#### Semi-structured Interview Guide with ESOL Teachers

##### **Introduction:**

Introduction of facilitators and the Somali Council involvement

Introduction of the project

Consent forms and recorder explained and signed (can names/positions be used?)

Outline of how the half hour focus group will proceed

Begin recording

Interviewee - state name and position.

##### **Questions:**

What is the procedure when a Somali student comes to the school (from intermediate or abroad)?

How is the ESOL level determined?

How is the number of integrated classes determined?

What are the most popular classes taken by Somali students?

Are there certain subjects that Somali students tend to be stronger or weaker in?

What do you see as the biggest barrier for Somali students at school (bullying, family situation, language, cultural differences, behaviour) and why?

Do you see other barriers, other than language, that may impede on Somali students outside of school (finding employment, preparing for university/polytechnic etc)?

Are the difficulties faced by Somali students different from other international students?

What would be some of the changes you would like to see concerning Somali students?

Do you think a support group would be useful to assist Somali students?

What initiatives have worked best in your school when assisting the learning of Somali students?

From your experience, could you make any suggestions for a mentoring or support group for Somali students?

In your eyes, what are the strengths of the Somali students at your school?

Do you have any other comments or suggestions concerning a Somali mentoring/support groups?

Do you know of any other support groups or agencies that have useful services for Somali students (e.g. career services, youth groups)?

Thank you for your time!

## *Interview/Focus Group Guides*

### Focus Group Guide for 'Stepping Stones' with Somali Students

#### **General Reminders:**

Look at the room provided in advance – To investigate whether room at school is suitable for activity; Ensure all resources have been brought and are easily accessible; Make sure all facilitators have a name tag; and sit on the floor with the students throughout the activity.

#### **Introduction:**

Informal introductions as the students arrive; Ask for them to fill in their contact details on the form provided; Check we have a consent form for each student present; Ask students to make themselves a name tag; and Introduction of the project

#### **Warm up/Ice breaker:**

Who is your role model and what is your favourite TV show (go around each student and facilitator)

#### **Focus Group ('Stepping Stones'):**

Break into small groups, each facilitator to work with one or two students; and Resource person to provide pens, stepping stones, crocodile and spears as needed and act as time-keeper.

1) What are your feelings about school/your education now?

- Ask the students to write on the paper figure and then place on the riverbank close to them.

2) How do you expect to feel and what are your goals when you have finished school/your education?

- Ask the students to write on the paper figure and then place on the riverbank further way from.

3) What factors make learning easier?

- Ask students to write these factors on the stepping stones.

- Ask for explanations and details about what they consider helpful to their learning.

4) What factors make learning challenging?

- Ask for students to write these factors on the crocodiles

- Ask for explanations and details about what they have noted as challenges

5) What are the possible solutions to the challenges you face?

- Ask students to write these solutions on the spears.

- Ask for explanations and details about what they have identified as possible solutions.

#### **Conclusions:**

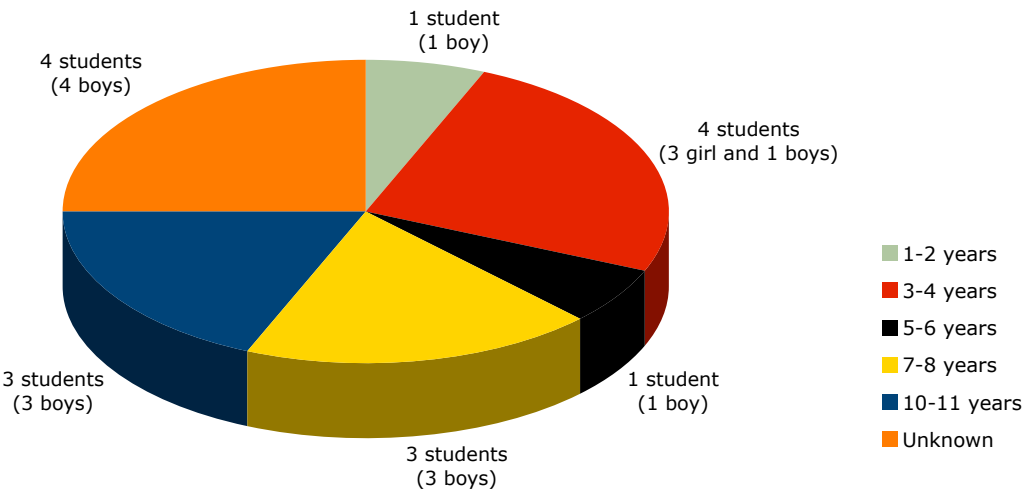
Ask the students if they have any final or general thoughts about the 'stepping stones' activity.

Thank students for participating and talking to us about their experiences.

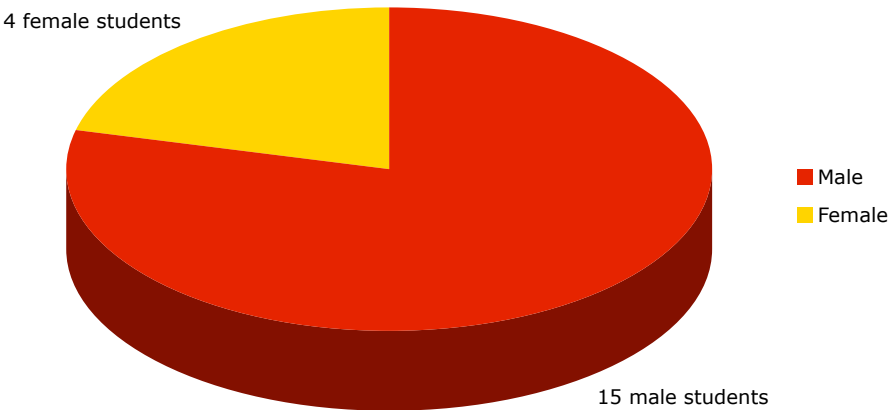
APPENDIX F

Graphical representation of Somali student participants

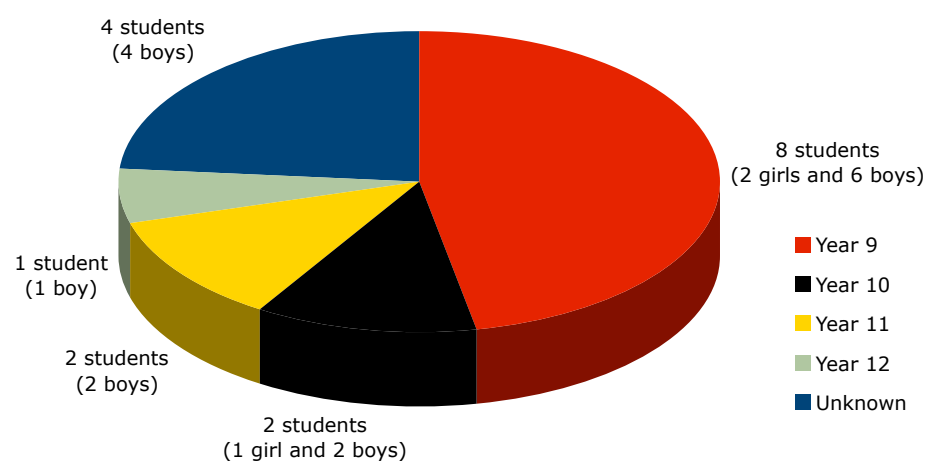
Number of years secondary school students have lived in New Zealand



Gender of secondary school Somali students



Year levels of Somali students at secondary school





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*If you have any questions or comments regarding this report  
please feel free to contact us.*

*Jamie Burford, Jenni Hammonds, Kendyll Morton and Sarah Clark  
School of Geography, Environment and Earth Sciences  
Victoria University of Wellington  
PO Box 600  
Wellington  
(04) 463 5337*

**Email:**

*burforjame@myvuw.ac.nz  
jen\_vs\_world@yahoo.com.au  
klm24@hotmail.com  
sarahclark52@hotmail.com*

**Thank you to the Wellington  
Somali Council for supporting  
this research.**